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Prepared for USDA Listening Session with Secretary Mike Johanns

By Randy Smith

Dear Mr. Secretary,

My name is Randy Smith and I am a farmer...a producer of apples, pears and cherries in the central Washington community of Cashmere.

I want to thank you for coming to our state to listen to the needs of farmers and rural community members. I have been active as a farmer activist in the public policy arena for almost twenty years. In that time I have seen many changes to our landscape and anticipate that in the next twenty will see many more. As those changes occur, I certainly hope that USDA will be able to focus much more on the future than on the past and will be an active partner in helping rural and urban Washington move forward.

With our focus today being on the 2007 farm bill, I believe that there already exists an institution in our state that is actively engaged in focusing on the future of not just rural Washington but the entire state. With USDA's additional help, that institution could be poised to make a much greater impact to benefit the people of our state. That institution is Washington State University, which is part of a much larger system...the land grant university system.

For the past 11 years I have served as one of Washington State University's representatives to the citizen advocacy group CARET, the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching. In my capacity with CARET I have worked with all our Representatives and Senators to provide them with the understanding of just how important USDA funding is to ensuring that local, regional and national issues of importance are addressed, utilizing the land grant university partnership that is now nearly 150 year old.

I have also observed how challenging it is to create the understanding in politicians and the general public's eyes of just how valuable a system this is. This is a system that has been meeting the needs of rural farmers and rural communities for decades, so that crisis will not develop. But

unfortunately it seems that today the only thing that get's the public's eye is a crisis.

In your press release regarding this listening session you indicated that you desired input regarding global & domestic competitiveness, achievement of conservation and environmental goals, enhancement of rural economic growth and the opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets and research. I would submit to you that the land grant university system, and in our case WSU, is in a unique position to help move our society forward on essentially all of these fronts, if they are provided the resources to ensure the capacity to do so. Here in the State of Washington, I could cite numerous examples of WSU filling some local need in every one of those areas, and unfortunately, many more instances where that need is remaining unfilled due to the lack of human and financial resources. I could tell you stories of how the agricultural community in our state hasn't been able to get research done due to the lack of scientists, or how local farmers now have to wait for days to talk to an extension agent about specific issues. But all those stories would be anecdotal in nature and you have heard them before. What is more important in my comments is the downward trend in Federal commitment that we have witnessed for the past 20 years.

Over the past 20 years I have had numerous opportunities to visit developing countries all over the world, the most recent being Belarus this past summer. I can assure you that none of them has a system that works as well as ours. The questions that are posed to me during these visits are virtually all the same...how can we create a system like your land grant system that ensures that the knowledge and understanding that is developed in academic circles is actually delivered to the population that needs it?

It seems unconscionable to me that at a time that we are moving rapidly into the era of globalization and a reordering of how we do business as a society and world, that we would diminish the importance one of the primary institutions that has vaulted us to the forefront of competitiveness for more than 100 years, yet that is what appears to be happening.

Mr. Secretary, as you move forward in your development of the 2007 Farm Bill, I urge you to take very seriously the challenge to reenergize the land grant system's role in research, extension and teaching for the benefit of not only our farm communities, but our entire society, by providing the

leadership that is desperately needed to help refocus our counties, states, and our entire country as to their role in the partnership. This will take dollars and it will take a commitment from you to allocate those dollars. Our system has spiraled downward for many years, and it is time to stop the decline.

Again, I thank you for coming to Washington to listen.

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